

2014 Winter Solstice Moreton Park Bridge to Vealand 21st December

This solstice, whilst quite mild, was wet and gusty blowing in frequent fine light clouds of misty rain and the path was leafy, muddy and wet. Not the best portents for our walk.

However, lack of undergrowth and the obvious recent clearance of saplings and old woody growth from the canal bed gave good views of some of the previously obscured bridges and stonework.

The recent spell of wet weather had filled parts of the canal resulting in standing, and in some cases running, water. This extended almost unbroken from Puckland Bridge almost to the Dunsdon reserve and gives a hint at what the result of re-watering more of the canal could be.

Sightings of wildlife were low as is fitting on the shortest day of the year. Most sensible creatures are tucked away to minimise their metabolism towards survival into the spring. Catkins held out the promise of the coming season

Fungi featured greatly with Candle Snuff, Blushing Bracket, Bleeding Crust, Common Puffball Common Funnel Cap and Witches Butter all recorded. The omnipresent Red Campion put forth a few brave blooms in contrast to the vivid yellow and rich green of gorse bushes.

Birds were apparent even if difficult to make out in the dim light with my shower-speckled spectacles. But, four species of tits – Blue, Great, Long-tailed and Marsh were all accounted for. So too was a new species for this location a Great Spotted Woodpecker.

There was only one mammal, a fleeting glimpse of a Grey Squirrel as it fled to the woods opposite the Holsworthy Branch junction. Although, the three Exmoor Ponies in the field by Vealand Bridge were a friendly group who were pleased to see us too.

Only one invertebrate was recorded – a common earwig struggling to escape from the bottom of the empty leaflet dispenser at the Vealand notice board. We were



Birch Catkins



Common Puffball -
Lycoperdon perlatum



Exmoor Ponies at Vealand

able to free it into the undergrowth. Perhaps a couple of holes in the bottom would prevent future imprisonment for all curious insects.



Common Earwig - *Forficula auricularia*